

Ravenwood Neighborhood Association
Catriona McCormack, President
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Falls Church VA 22044

John Thillmann, Chairman
Seven Corners Revitalization Task Force

VIA EMAIL to JHTcav@aol.com

Dear Chairman Thillman,

On behalf of the Ravenwood Neighborhood Association, I would like to thank you for your service to our community chairing the Task Force on the revitalization of the Seven Corners area. Our neighborhood includes all of the homes on Juniper Lane, lower Villa Lane, and lower Valley Lane. We will be heavily and directly affected by redevelopment at Seven Corners, and particularly impacted by redevelopment of the current Sears property.

As an Association, we support development that brings new amenities to Seven Corners and upgrades the quality of the existing retail and commercial buildings. We understand that to make such redevelopment appealing to and economically viable for property owners, higher density construction will be required. We do not reflexively oppose higher density on the properties along Route 7 that abut our neighborhood. However, we seek your assistance in developing and implementing a process by which the needs and concerns of the neighborhoods most affected – both positively and negatively - by redevelopment will be taken into account through constructive engagement with the community.

In the spirit of such engagement, we would like to share the following significant recommendations with the Task Force as the planning for revitalization moves forward:

- 1) *Access for vehicles to the new, higher density buildings should be solely off Route 7, and should not increase traffic through surrounding neighborhoods.*

Our neighborhood of approximately 100 homes has many children who are school age and younger. We have no sidewalks. Lower Valley, Juniper, and Villa Lanes are narrow and twisty, with obstructed views around tight corners and over hills; a deep open culvert runs along part of Villa. Of necessity, children, their parents and neighbors ride bicycles and skateboards, walk dogs, and jog in the street. Construction of hundreds of new housing units, and new, more appealing retail units, will likely increase traffic to

even more dangerous levels on these neighborhood lanes unless vehicular access to the new development is limited to Leesburg Pike.

- 2) *Measures to relieve congestion through Seven Corners, including, but not limited to, public transportation to the East Falls Church metro stop, should precede higher density construction.*

Traffic through the Seven Corners intersection is a major concern, and is growing worse. There is no safe way to walk to the East Falls Church Metro station from neighborhoods on the western side of Seven Corners, and no access to the closest Metro via bus or shuttle. Often, (including during off-peak hours) it can take ten minutes or longer to travel one short mile along Route 7 through the Seven Corners intersection to the edge of Falls Church City, or along Wilson Boulevard through the Seven Corners intersection to Route 50. The addition of hundreds of Bailey's Elementary children and staff to the retrofitted office building in Seven Corners will only exacerbate and extend the current traffic jams.

Any plan for higher density development approved for Seven Corners should include multiple steps to be taken by the developers and the County to improve traffic flow and limit additional cars, including, but not limited to:

- Redesigning the Seven Corners intersection to eliminate bottlenecks and redirect cars from, or move cars through, the intersection more efficiently
- Providing viable bus or shuttle service to the East Falls Church Metro to alleviate the need for cars
- Limiting parking availability for new residences to one or fewer cars per unit, and requiring cars to park underground rather than on neighborhood streets
- Improving pedestrian/bicycle safety at and around the Seven Corners intersection to increase community walkability/bikeability.

- 3) *Plans for higher density should include reasonable numbers of "stepped down" two story townhouses to preserve the character of abutting neighborhoods with single family homes.*

We understand that plans currently under discussion for the Sears property could include more than 100 multi-story townhouses along the side of the property abutting the adjacent neighborhoods, including ours. Construction of tall townhouses alongside single-family homes would significantly reduce the homes' privacy, impact their viewscape, and increase noise pollution. Our neighborhood has successfully integrated a multi-family home on Juniper Lane that does not detract from the character of the neighborhood or make the neighbors feel loomed over. We hope that any plans for additional townhouses will have equally successful design.

- 4) *The impact on local schools must be taken into consideration when appropriate density levels are being determined.*

Our neighborhood is deeply disappointed in both the process leading, and the final decision, to spend nearly \$20 million to convert a vastly inappropriate office building at Seven Corners into an “urban school” for several hundred elementary school age children who will have no outdoor play space. We are concerned about the implications for the quality of education for the children in such a facility; increased traffic; decreased property values; and likelihood of school success given the lack of community support and, frankly, outright community animosity. Bailey’s Elementary is not alone in overcrowding; Sleepy Hollow Elementary has only recently removed its trailers, and Jeb Stuart is rapidly becoming the most overcrowded high school in the Fairfax County school district.

Given the need for affordable family housing in this area, it cannot be assumed that even one bedroom or studio apartments or condos may not end up as homes for families with multiple children in the schools. We believe that this inevitability must be taken into account when determining the number of residential units that can be supported by county and school infrastructure.

Thank you again for the work you are doing to improve the quality of life for all of us who live in the Seven Corners area, and for those who may live here in the future. We look forward to working with you to address these concerns, and to develop an exciting and workable vision and plan for future redevelopment.

Sincerely,

Catriona McCormack

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